

Populating the Greater Germanic Empire

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Populating the Greater Germanic Empire: Introduction

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Nationalsozialisten (Munich: Siedler, 2009; English translation: *The Making of a Nazi Hero: The Murder and Myth of Horst Wessel* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), *Metrople und Verbrechen: Die Gerichtsreportage in Berlin, Paris und Chicago, 1919-1933* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2007). From 2011 to 2014, Siemens has served as the DAAD Francis L. Carsten lecturer in Modern German History at University College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies.

Gerhard Wolf is Lecturer in History and Deputy Director of the Centre for German-Jewish Studies at Sussex University. He has published on Nazi anti-Jewish and more generally Nazi population policies, including *Ideologie und Herrschaftsrationalität: nationalsozialistische Germanisierungspolitik in Polen* (Hamburg, 2012).

In 1943, when the German military campaign was decisively weakened after the Wehrmacht's defeat at Stalingrad, Werner Daitz, a long-time economic adviser of the NSDAP, published his book *Lebensraum und gerechte Weltordnung: Grundlagen einer Anti-Atlantikcharta*, literally 'Living Space and Just World Order: Fundamentals of an Anti-Atlantic Charta'. Since the beginning of the Second World War, Daitz was engaged in a propaganda campaign for what he referred to as 'völkische Großraumwirtschaft', that is large-scale economic planning based on *völkisch* ideas. Daitz predicted the advent of a new world order with the hegemony of the declining British Empire and the United States displaced by a united Europe which were to derive its superior stability and power from the fact that, under German rule, its political borders would perfectly align with its biological and cultural settlement areas.¹ An empire could only survive, Daitz lectured, if its territorial reach coincided with the natural 'living space' of its peoples. The principles of a people's community, defined as the 'small-scale living space of a given people' (*Kleinlebensraum des Volkstums*), remained also valid for the 'greater living space of the family of peoples' (*Großlebensraum der Völkerfamilie*).²

In 1943, linking the future stability of Nazi expansion to the Germanisation of conquered lands, as Daitz did, was no longer only a theoretical proposition but informed German policies on the ground. This was certainly not lost on the Polish government in exile. In a study under the telling title 'Quest for German blood', it accused the Germans of a large-scale de-nationalisation and forced assimilation campaign that was aiming at nothing less than the destruction of the Polish people.³ And it was certainly not lost on one of the first scholars of Nazi crimes when he connected, for example, the ban of French teaching and the compulsory introduction of German in Luxemburg schools to the mass killings of Jews in the East. For Raphael Lemkin in his magisterial study *Axis rule in occupied Europe*, published in 1944 in American exile, these were two aspects of one policy: the 'destruction of the national

pattern of the oppressed ... [and] the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor' for which he coined the term genocide.⁴

We have started with these contemporary observations because they demonstrate what, we argue, would get increasingly lost later on in the otherwise extensive historiography of Nazi Germany: the close link between territorial expansion and what Hitler, in his seminal speech after the defeat of Poland, had called the quest for 'a new ethnographic order' in Europe. It is precisely at this point that this special issue sets in. All four contributions start from the premise that the notions of *Lebensraum* and *Volksgemeinschaft* need to be analysed as interrelated and interdependent notions pointing to the inner core of what drove the entire Nazi project. In doing so, this special issue is an intervention into a debate which has often failed to pay attention to this close nexus. If historians were interested in the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*, then in order to understand the regime's early years and its attempt to strengthen its grip on power while, by contrast, studies dealing with the idea of *Lebensraum* do so in the context of German expansionist ideology, politics, and military occupation after the outbreak of war.⁵ In a way it might not come as a surprise to see why the explanatory power of *Volksgemeinschaft* as an analytical term seemed to be limited to the time before the war given that the signatory crimes of the Nazi regime ranging from mass deportations, forced labour or the annihilation of Soviet prisoners of war and European Jewry could all be understood as different exclusionary aspects of radical population policies aiming to eliminate all non-German(ic) peoples from a territory destined to become German living space. However, the understandable focus on these mass crimes, in other words on the 'negative' aspects of Nazi population policies, as Götz Aly phrased it, borrowing from a distinction made by Erhard Wetzel, a top-level bureaucrat in the Ministry for the Occupied Territories commenting on the murderous SS General Plan East (*Generalplan Ost*), came at a price. They systematically overshadowed the 'positive' elements, an expression used by Aly to describe

policies aiming at often enforced and also violent attempts to include those parts of the local population who could be assimilated into the German people's community.⁶

Historical research tended to keep these two different aspects of Nazi population policy apart with studies on the establishment of the people's community rarely spilling over into those focussing on the expansion eastwards. Unsurprisingly, the first studies on Nazi occupation policies emerged first in those countries that had suffered most. Poland is a case in point. While not ignoring the extent to which German authorities had brought parts of the local population particularly in the borderlands to throw in their lot with the occupiers, this—as it was called in Polish historiography—*germanizacja*, i.e. Germanization, was seen to have rested almost entirely upon coercion and open terror.⁷ In the west, by contrast, historians seemed much less interested in Nazi occupation or, more specifically, population policies in conquered eastern Europe. Some studies on individual aspects notwithstanding, often focussing on specific regions or Nazi institutions,⁸ it was not until the last two decades of the twentieth century that this changed and, for example, the megalomaniac SS dystopia as laid down in the General Plan East was taken seriously as one possible explanation for the explosion of violence in the occupied east. Equally important, it was only then when historians started to realize that there was a causal connection between the settlement of Germans and genocidal policies.⁹ Here, too, however, the focus was very much on explaining the extremely high level of violence unleashed both at the front, in in the so-called 'war of annihilation', and in the occupied territories with, for example, the settlement of Baltic Germans in western Poland of interest mainly as a function for the radicalisation of anti-Slavic and anti-Jewish persecution.¹⁰ It is in the more recent studies that implicitly or explicitly place Nazi expansionist policy in a colonial framework, where an analysis of this massive violence against so-called *völkisch* or racial aliens does not entirely overshadow German 'nation building'.¹¹ Whether in the Wartheland in Poland or at Hegewald in the Ukraine, the ideological construction of the 'other', so fundamental for the justification of

violence, seemed to have gone hand in hand with the reassuring vision of establishing the German people's community abroad.¹² Amidst the unfolding Holocaust in the Western Poland, BDM women were dispatched to ensure that the local German population as well as the various ethnic Germans who had just arrived from different parts of Eastern Europe understood what was expected of them as the nucleus of the new German *Volksgemeinschaft*.¹³

However, such observations are not yet fully integrated in how present-day historians perceive and discuss the origins, nature and scope of the *Volksgemeinschaft* in the later years of the Nazi regime. Although the intensive debate of the recent decade seems to slowly converge around the insight that historical scholarship has much to gain from analysing this term and its colourful meanings, regardless of its preeminent place in the *Lingua Tertii Imperii*, most studies still concentrate on the early periods of the Nazi regime and on the territory of the Old Reich.¹⁴ For this territory and time, it is meanwhile well-established that the regime's high approval rates as well as its at times excessive violence was to a significant degree grounded in the emotions and the desire to belong to this *Volksgemeinschaft* – in other words, that integration in this national community and terror against alleged 'outsiders' were mutually dependent.¹⁵ Yet, in which ways this pre-war *Volksgemeinschaft* changed with the German aggressive annexation and occupation policy in the late 1930s, whether and how this ideal was practically applied in multi-ethnic territories under the German control, and how those offered the change to belong to it reacted to this proposition, these and similar questions are still not sufficiently tackled.¹⁶ Against this background, the four articles in this special issue stand on the shoulders of the previous research on *Lebensraum* and *Volksgemeinschaft*, yet they aim of advancing it by providing at least some answers to these questions.

The first article by Armin Nolzen takes a fresh look at the German occupation policies in those territories that originally bordered the German Reich and which, from 1935 onwards, were either peacefully integrated or violently annexed. He begins with a careful analysis of

the NSDAP's efforts to organize the so-called German Front in the Saar and then goes on to demonstrate that they served as a blueprint for its relations with ethnic German organisations in Lorraine, Lower Stry and in the General Government in the following years. In all of these regions, the NSDAP attempted to use those individuals that it had identified as 'ethnic Germans' as the nucleus for the new social order, modelled according to the criteria of the *Volksgemeinschaft* in the so-called Altreich, i.e. Nazi Germany in the borders of 1937. Yet, the relations between the party and the 'ethnic Germans' often remained strained – in part due of the power struggles in the polycratic Reich, in part because of party's attempt to assimilate or to fully integrated previously independent ethnic German organizations on the ground. As Nolzen demonstrates, being classified as an 'ethnic German' and thus to be accepted into the *Volksgemeinschaft* was not the result of a onetime decision, but a volatile and reversible form of belonging.

Daniel Siemens' article on the settlement initiatives of the Nazi stormtroopers (SA) analyses on how this organization, building on ideas and initiatives of 'inner colonisation', in the second half of the 1930s began to develop plans for large-scale colonisation projects in the annexed and occupied parts of Eastern Europe. These plans, drafted in particular by SA-General Siegfried Kasche, between 1938 and 1942 the so-called 'commissioner of the SA Chief of Staff for the placement of new farmers and matters of ethnicity', have previously escaped historiographical scrutiny. Although the SA's ambitions in 'Germanization' suffered a serious backlash with the outbreak of the war and in particular due to its rivalries with the more powerful SS, Siemens demonstrates that the organisation contributed to the formation of the *Volksgemeinschaft* in the occupied territories and that it envisaged to play a leading role in these regions once the war would be won.

Gerhard Wolf's studies the practices of German occupation policies in the Warthegau, Polish territory that was annexed by the German Reich shortly after the beginning of the Second World War. Wolf argues that establishing the German *Volksgemeinschaft* in such a

multi-ethnic region was a difficult task for the occupiers that could not be solved by relying on (supposed) racial criteria. Instead, the attribution of ‘Germaness’ hinged decisively on individuals’ behaviour and their cultural affiliation with Germany prior to 1939. Wolf demonstrates that, as a consequence, the local populations were not passive objects of German occupation bureaucracies, but had a surprisingly high level of agency that they used as best as they could to convince the authorities of their ‘value’ for the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

Finally, Geraldien von Frijtag Drabbe Künzel reveals that the grandiose vision of a Germanic Eastern Europe held an appeal that was not restricted to the National Socialists of Germany. Between 1941 and 1944 over five thousand civilians from the Netherlands left for work in the German-occupied East. They regarded themselves as ‘pioneers’ of a large-scale colonization project that was to involve all peoples of ‘Germanic’ origin and that was to make good for the losses of Dutch colonies overseas. Although the project enjoyed the goodwill of Himmler and his SS, it quickly ran into trouble, due to unrealistic expectations on both the German and the Dutch side, but even more so because of the changing course of the war. As von Frijtag Drabbe Künzel can show, however, the imperial dimension of ‘Germanization’ policies reached out well beyond the boundaries of individual nations. Her analysis invites for further study on the appeal of the idea of ‘living space’ in a wider European context.

Establishing the German people’s community, this is the argument of all four contributions, was not restricted to the territory of the *Altreich* and did not lose its salience in 1939. Indeed, it became a central element in the ideology and practice of Nazi occupation policies from the late 1930s and fuelled the mass violence on the way to what the Nazis called their Greater Germanic Empire.

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Endnotes

¹ *Lebensraum und gerechte Weltordnung: Grundlagen einer Anti-Atlantikcharta.*

Ausgewählte Aufsätze von Werner Daitz (Amsterdam: De Amsterdamsche Keurkamer, 1943).

² Werner Daitz, 'Echte und unechte Großräume', p. 37, and 'Die Erneuerung des Reiches und die Wiedergeburt Europas aus dem Lebensgesetz der europäischen Völkerfamilie', p. 131, both in Daitz, *Lebensraum und gerechte Weltordnung*.

³ Polish Ministry of Information (ed.), *The quest for German blood: policy of Germanization in Poland* (London: Polish Ministry of Information, 1943).

⁴ Raphael Lemkin, *Axis rule in occupied Europe: Laws of occupation, analysis of government, proposal for redress*, 2nd edn. (Clark: The Lawbook Exchange, 2008), pp. 79 and 84-89.

⁵ One of the few exceptions is Wolfram Pyta, "'Menschenökonomie': Das Ineinandergreifen von ländlicher Sozialraumgestaltung und rassenbiologischer Bevölkerungspolitik im NS-Staat', *Historische Zeitschrift*, Vol. 273, No. 1, 2001, pp. 31-94.

⁶ Eberhard Wetzel in Götz Aly and Susanne Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung: Auschwitz und die deutschen Pläne für eine neue europäische Ordnung* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1997), pp. 415-416; Götz Aly, *'Endlösung': Völkerverschiebung und der Mord an den europäischen Juden* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1999), p. 375.

⁷ Jerzy Marczewski, *Hitlerowska koncepcja polityki kolonizacyjno-wysiedlen'czej i jej realizacja w 'Okregu Warty'*, (Poznan: Institut Zachodny, 1979); Czesław Łuczak, *Polityka ludnościowa i ekonomiczna hitlerowskich Niemiec w okupowanej Polsce*, (Poznan: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1979); Zofia Boda-Kreżel, *Sprawa Volkslisty na Górnym Śląsku: Koncepcje likwidacji problemu i ich realizacja* (Opole: Instytut Slaski w Opolu, 1978); Czesław Madajczyk, *Polityka III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce*, 2 Vols. (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1970); Stanisław Adamski, *Pogląd na rozwój sprawy narodowościowej w województwie slaskim w czasie okupacji niemieckiej* (Katowice: Księgarnia Św. Jacka w Katowicach, 1946).

⁸ See, for example, Robert L. Koehl, *RKFDV: German resettlement and population policy 1939-1945: A history of the Reich Commission for the Strengthening of Germandom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957); Martin Broszat, *Nationalsozialistische Polenpolitik 1939 – 1945* (Stuttgart, Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1961).

⁹ Mechtild Rössler and Sabine Schleiermacher (eds.), *Der 'Generalplan Ost': Hauptlinien der nationalsozialistischen Planungs- und Vernichtungspolitik* (Berlin: Akademie, 1993); Bruno Wasser, *Himmlers Raumplanung im Osten: Der Generalplan Ost in Polen 1940-1944* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1993); Czesław Madajczyk (ed.), *Vom Generalplan Ost zum Generalsiedlungsplan* (München: K. G. Saur, 1994), Christopher Browning, 'Nazi resettlement policy and the search for a solution to the Jewish uestion, 1939–1941', *German Studies Review*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (1986), pp. 497-519; Hans-Christian Harten, *De-Kulturation und Germanisierung: Die nationalsozialistische Rassen- und Erziehungspolitik in Polen 1939-1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1996). In broader perspective: Götz Aly, *'Endlösung': Völkerverschiebung und der Mord an den europäischen Juden* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1999).

¹⁰ Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (ed.), *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941 – 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2002); Wolf Kaiser (ed.), *Täter im Vernichtungskrieg: Der Überfall auf die Sowjetunion und der Völkermord an den Juden* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2002); Jochen Böhrer, *Auftakt zum Vernichtungskrieg: Die Wehrmacht in Polen 1939* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2006); Christian Hartmann, *Wehrmacht im Ostkrieg: Front und militärisches Hinterland 1941/42* (München: Oldenbourg, 2010).

¹¹ Patrick Bernhard, 'Hitler's Africa in the east: Italian colonialism as a model for German planning in eastern Europe', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 51, No. 1, 2016, pp. 61-90; Volker Langbehn and Mohammad Salama (eds.), *German colonialism: race, the Holocaust, and post-war Germany* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Jürgen Zimmerer, 'Die Geburt des "Ostlandes" aus dem Geist des Kolonialismus: Die nationalsozialistische Eroberungs- und Beherrschungspolitik in (post-)kolonialer Perspektive', *Sozial.Geschichte*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 2004, pp. 10-43.

¹² David Bruce Furber, 'Going east: Colonialism and German life in Nazi-occupied Poland' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of New York at Buffalo, 2003); Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2005)

¹³ Elizabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi east: Agents and witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003).

¹⁴ For the current state of research, see the contributions in Martina Steber and Bernhard Gotto (eds.), *Visions of community in Nazi Germany: social engineering and private lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). See also Janosch Steuer, 'Was meint und nützt das Sprechen von der "Volksgemeinschaft"? Neuere Literatur zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, Vol. 53, 2013, pp. 487-534; Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann (ed.), *'Volksgemeinschaft': Mythos, wirkungsmächtige soziale*

Verheißung oder soziale Realität im 'Dritten Reich'? (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2012); Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt (eds.), *Volksgemeinschaft: Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2009).

¹⁵ Pointedly: Thomas Kühne, *Belonging and genocide: Hitler's community, 1918-1945* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010).

¹⁶ The Nazis themselves propagated several competing terms. They used *Kampfgemeinschaft*, or 'fighting community', *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*, literally 'community of fate', and *Opfergemeinschaft*, 'community of sacrifice' almost interchangeably: Steber and Gotto, 'Volksgemeinschaft: Writing the Social History of the Nazi Regime', in Steber and Gotto (eds.), *Visions of Community*, p. 5.